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ITEM 5:* STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE STATE-OF-THE-ENVIRONMENT REPORT 1992: "POVERTY AND THE ENVIRONMENT"

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

This brief summary requested by the Governing Council in its decisions 16/15C paragraph 3 and 16/5 paragraph 1(c), outlines the contents of the State-of-the-Environment Report for 1992: "Poverty and Environment". Briefly, the report covers: introduction to poverty; gaps between the rich and poor; the environment of the poor - rural poverty and environment, urban poverty and environment, disasters and the poor, environmental refugees of 2100; dumping on the poor; the migration syndrome; and the poverty gridlock and environment.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the summary of the, Executive Director's State-of-the-Environment Report 1992: "Poverty and Environment".

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* Refers to the number of the item on the Provisional Agenda (UNEP/GC.17/1).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE STATE-OF-THE-ENVIRONMENT REPORT 1992: "POVERTY AND THE ENVIRONMENT"

1. By its decision 16/15C paragraph 3, the Governing Council called upon the Executive Director to prepare the 1992 State-of-the-Environment (SOE) report on the issue of poverty and environment. In its decision 16/5, paragraph 1(c) the Council also requested the Executive Director to submit to it a brief executive summary of the SOE report which should continue to be issued as an annual basis but not as an official document of the Governing Council (decision 16/5, paragraph 1(b).

2. Due to the intensive effort required for the production of the 1993 comprehensive state-of-the-environment report *The World Environment 1972-1992 : Two Decades of Challenge*, which was launched in December 1992, and its analytical version *Saving Our Planet: Challenges and Hopes*, which was produced in time for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992, the finalization of the 1992 SOE Report "Poverty and Environment" has been delayed.

3. The 1992 SOE Report "Poverty and Environment", at the time of writing this summary for the Governing Council, had been completed by a consultant. It is anticipated that the report will be translated into the languages of the United Nations for printing by UNEP and distribution to Governments later in 1993. The timing for this is dependent on the preparation of documents for the seventeenth session of the Governing Council. However, the report should be available for World Environment Day 1993, the theme of which is poverty.

4. The 1992 SOE report "Poverty and Environment" will be some 40 pages long. It examines the status of poverty in the world and the major interrelations between poverty and environment. The report concludes that the only way out of the vicious cycle of poverty and environmental degradation is to eliminate poverty by promoting sustainable and environmentally sound development.

5. The report is structured as follows:

I. **Introduction** Section I describes poverty and the variations within and among countries. It also describes the conditions under which poor people live and the problems they face.

II. **The Gaps Between the Rich and Poor** This section discusses population increase and its consequences for the pace of national economic development, political stability and human rights in developing countries; and the perpetuation of the gap between rich and poor countries. The discussion touches on employment, structural adjustment, falling commodity prices and foreign debts, which it is concluded, are contributing to the widening gap between developed and developing countries, in spite of the fact that disparities in indicators of basic human survival (primary education, life expectancy, infant and child mortality) have narrowed considerably during the last three decades. The widening gap, however, is likely to lead to increased disparities between North and South in terms of human development. The discussion also covers the disparities within nations, in particular between rural and urban populations.

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III. **The Environment and the Poor** In this section there is discussion of the cycle of economic problems that cause or aggravate environmental degradation, which in turn makes economic and structural reform difficult to achieve. Immediate survival requires choices that degrade the environment; such choices are not the result of a lack of concern for the future. Poverty and environmental degradation have thus come to reinforce one another, to perpetuate destitution in many developing countries. The discussion studies in more detail the effects of poverty on people and the environment under the following subheadings:

- **Rural Poverty and Environment:** covering exploitation of fragile resources; land degradation and soil erosion; flooding; deforestation; loss of biodiversity; human health; and urbanization;

- **Urban Poverty and Environment:** covering the economic, social and environmental problems of rapid and mostly unplanned urbanization, e.g. overcrowding, unsanitary living conditions, social unrest and environmental pollution from liquid and solid wastes, and water and air pollution;

- **Disasters and the Poor:** covering the increasing occurrence and/or impacts of natural disasters (drought, floods) caused by human activities; the risks from industrial accidents;

- **The Environmental Refugees of 2100:** discussing the way in which millions of poor people, temporarily or permanently displaced because of different disasters, create environmental, socio-economic and cultural problems. This section also notes the effects of global warming and sea-level rise.

- **Dumping on the Poor:** covering the export of sub-standard products to developing countries and the dumping of hazardous wastes.

IV. **The Migration Syndrome** Section IV briefly discusses the migration of intellectuals, scientists and skilled workers, and some of the resulting socio-economic and environmental problems such as low-paid and dangerous jobs and urbanization.

V. **The Poverty Gridlock and Environment** The report concludes that in the last two decades little has been done to reduce poverty and the disparities between and within countries. It is acknowledged that environmental degradation is not necessarily directly caused by poverty, but is frequently attributable to inefficient management and inappropriate policies. However, it is recognized that economic deprivation and environmental degradation have reinforced one another to perpetuate destitution in many developing countries. The major causes of the continued deterioration of the global environment are considered to be unsustainable patterns of consumption and production (particularly in industrialized countries) and unsustainable development and resource destruction by the poor (particularly in developing countries).

6. Poverty and the environmental problems of the South are a global problem, requiring global solutions. The report concludes that the struggle against poverty is the shared responsibility of all countries. Ways of meeting this challenge include official development assistance, the furthering of environmentally sound and sustainable development, economic reforms, access for developing countries to the technologies they need, and community participation.